

## Now News Travels Faster Than Report Of Bad Break In Market

By Monte Noelke

9-11-69

Page 10

MERTZON — Samuel Morse's code has never been able to spread news as fast as the word-of-mouth system used in the Shortgrass Country. The most miraculous devices of the nation's wire services have yet to attain the speed at which an item can be shot across the ranchlands via the beauty shop circuit and the coffee house linkage.

True to the nature of neighbor-to-neighbor communications, slight errors can arise. September steers can unexpectedly move at, says 36 cents on the same day that an unusually large baby is delivered in a local hospital. By the time the communique is completely transmitted, the tail-end subscribers may have it that calves have dropped 12½ points and autumn babies are being weighed in daily at weights ranging from 36 to 37 pounds, depending on weather, shrink, and weigh conditions.

In our entire history, the swiftest report ever to spread was dispatched from the San Angelo marketing center during the lowest point of the Great Drouth of the 1950s. A small bunch of cutback yearling ewes sold for \$6 per head. On the following day a handful of corriente cows and their calves fetched \$85 per pair.

By the opening of the next week's market, the last dealer in animal products to hear of these two calamities was an in-and-out trader in walrus tusks on an island off the northernmost coast of the Arctic Ocean. (He later told his banker that he'd have been able to take advantage of the news had not a heavy gale temporarily disrupted contact with the mainland.)

Instant repercussions were felt elsewhere in the livestock industry. Horror stories were widely spread to the extent that the keeper of an oxen livery stable in lower Mexico was stricken by permanent muteness. In the upper reaches of New England a long-time blacksmith traded his forge and anvil for a smooth-mouthed monkey and an out-of-date organ grinder. To climax the effects of the bad news, the peace of a western stock raising community was shattered by the president of the local Optimist Club running through the streets shouting, "For God's sake the market is ruined. Take your plowshares and turn them into Damascus swords."

As in all turbulent situations, the men closest to the auction were the calmest. Those who should have been worst affected — the Shortgrassers — went about their business as if a fresh vein of gold was sifting dust into their dry river beds.

You see, by the mid-'50s my people had become so benumbed by the dry catastrophe that the Internal Revenue Service no longer allowed us to use dentists' laughing gas as a medical deduction. Tooth extractions could have been performed in waiting rooms, as far as the patients were concerned.

Conditions had worsened until major operations would be done without a single cubic centimeter of chloroform. It wasn't uncommon to see hombres who'd shaved off their ear lobes without knowing what they'd done. The land, as you may know, was so stricken by grief that if General Sherman's march to the sea had been restaged, publicity men would have had to work unusually hard to bring the event to people's attention.

Present day coverage of the domestic scene continues to flourish, but a measure of the old zip seems to have disappeared from the marketing lines. Ten days ago, for example, a large offering of yearling ewes sold at \$32 per head at mid-day in the largest sheep auction in the United States without a murmur from the trading and order buying community. Shortly thereafter, a well advertised Central Texas cow sale reached proportions comparable to highs in the diamond trade, but other than the trade newspaper and a few overly inquisitive ranchers, buyers remained unaware of the glorious new price structure. The only plausible explanation offered the middlemen's lack of enthusiasm was that they were overcome with patriotism and were trying to cooperate with the Presidents plea to curb inflation.

All of ranchdom may continue to have to live without many of modern man's conveniences, but the day will never come when we won't be the best informed people on earth, especially in the field of inner-industry disasters.